

A Message from Commissioner C. Earl Hunter

Another year has brought another round of opportunities and challenges for the state's public health agency, a mere snapshot of what you will see in the following pages of the 2004 Healthy People Living in Healthy Communities annual report.

In 2003, DHEC staff rallied to address critical public health issues despite a third year of funding and staff reductions. Internally, our evaluation of programs and services continues with a focus on retaining and enhancing our public health functions of preventing infectious, food and water borne diseases; enforcing laws and regulations for public health and environmental protection; and preventing chronic diseases.

Some of our successes over the past year include the further development of our public health preparedness efforts statewide, including our epidemiological surveillance and lab capacity as well as our partnership with law enforcement and other agencies to assure a safe South Carolina. A real-time test of our abilities occurred in October 2003 with the discovery of the poison ricin in an Upstate postal facility, which drew national attention to the apparent poisoning attempt. Each day, we are tasked with responding to emergencies, outbreaks and new infectious diseases throughout the state, and our preparedness continues to improve.

Also last year, another partnership effort began, one to develop and promote legislation to assist the state's critically ailing trauma system. Our partnerships with local governments to address air quality standards, our work toward protecting our natural resources along the coast, and our statewide assessment of children's oral health needs all were accomplished by staff willing to take on more responsibilities with less resources.

Our challenges ahead are many. We continue to look more closely at the effectiveness of some programs in the wake of funding reductions. We are addressing our technology needs, researching best practices nationwide as well as worldwide, and identifying any barriers to customer service.

We appreciate the participation of our public health partners over the past year, and our hope in the coming year is that you will continue to support the health and environment of South Carolina and to offer your thoughts on what we can do to be the best public health agency in the nation.

C. Earl Hunter

